

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Amelia Earhart: A Des Moines Connection



Amelia Earhart was born in 1897. She lived with her grandparents in Atchison, Kansas, while her father, Edwin, worked for the Rock Island Railroad in Kansas City, Missouri. Edwin, a lawyer, was transferred to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1907. He moved his two daughters, Amelia and Muriel, to Des Moines around 1909.

Edwin was an alcoholic, which caused an unstable financial situation for his family. It is also possibly the reason the family moved frequently. Amelia's family only lived in Des Moines for a few years, but they lived in at least five residences during that time.

Des Moines city directories list Edward or "Edw." as working for the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway Company (CRI&P Ry Co).

Different sources state that Amelia moved with her mother to Illinois in 1914, but there is not an Edw. or Amy (her mother) listed in the Des Moines City Directory after 1912.

**The family lived at the following addresses
in Des Moines during the years listed:**

1806 Arlington Avenue — 1907

1443 8th — 1908, 1909

1530 8th — 1910

4201 University Avenue — 1911

3002 Cottage Grove — 1912

According to some sources, Amelia did not attend a public school until she came to Des Moines. She began in seventh grade at the age of 12. It is difficult to say what school or schools she attended before moving to Illinois.

At least two of the Des Moines houses she lived in are still standing.



1443 8th Street (street view)
(From Google Maps)



1530 8th Street (street view)
(From Google Maps)



Amelia Earhart.

Amelia Mary Earhart (1897-1937?), America's famous aviatrix, moved to Des Moines in 1908 as a young girl. At age 10 she saw her first airplane at the Iowa State Fair. She left Des Moines in 1914 and moved to Chicago. In October 1922 Earhart began participating in record-breaking attempts and set a women's altitude record of 14,000 feet. She was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic (June 1928) and made the first solo flight from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast (September 1928). Shortly thereafter she visited several Iowa towns on a series of lecture tours. In 1929 she formed the now-famous women pilots' organization, the Ninety-Nines. In 1932 she was the first woman to successfully make a solo flight across the Atlantic. In 1935 she made a trans-Pacific flight from Hawaii to California. On June 1, 1937, she began her attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world. On July 2, 1937, her last voice transmission was heard, "KHAQQ calling Itasca. (U.S. Coast Guard cutter) We must be on you but cannot see you... gas is running low..." The fate of Amelia Earhart has fascinated Americans since she and her navigator, Fred Noonan, disappeared during that flight. Some believe the two drowned because their plane ran out of fuel. Others believe they were killed or captured by the Japanese. But there is no firm evidence to prove any of the theories.

In the book [*Historical Highlights of the Iowa State Fair*](#) (excerpt below), it does not mention airplane flights in 1908. However, it does place the Wright Brothers at the fair in 1911.

The Wright Brothers were under contract for four airplane flights per day during the 1911 Fair. Church ladies opened a day nursery in the Women's Rest Cottage so mothers could thoroughly enjoy the Fair by leaving their children in good hands. The Baby Health Contest began. Machinery Hall, the 5.5 acre building now known as the Varied Industries Building, was constructed. J.K. Daniels sculpted the Fair's first butter cow, an ongoing tradition that would become an Iowa State Fair icon.



*The interior of the Varied Industries Building.
(Undated photo.)*

Three aviators in the air at the same time, each with a different kind of machine (Wright and Curtis biplanes and a Nieuport monoplane), were promised in 1912. Work on the new \$25,000 Horse Barn progressed rapidly. A new streetcar entrance was unveiled and bleacher seats erected in front of the racetrack doubled seating capacity.

Newspaper Features

The Des Moines Register

Saturday, July 7, 1928

Amelia Can't Visit Here Until Fall

Miss Amelia Earhart, first woman to span the Atlantic by plane and former Des Moines school girl, will be unable to visit "the old home town" until her present itinerary is completed, a special dispatch to The Register stated yesterday.

Miss Earhart was invited to visit this city by council members shortly after she had accomplished the feat that has placed her in the limelight of aviation activity.

"The plans of Miss Earhart will not include a visit to Des Moines during July," her manager, George Palmer Putnam, declared in New York yesterday. "She appreciates the invitation received from Mayor John MacVicar, but will be unable to accept, at least for some time."

Mr. Putnam stated that he had wired Mayor MacVicar that it was impossible to make a stopover at Des Moines on Miss Earhart's trip to Chicago, but that a visit might be arranged at some later date, probably in the fall.

The former Des Moines girl with her companions on the Newfoundland to Wales flight, Lou

Gordon and Wilmer Stultz, will go to Boston Monday, returning to New York Wednesday.

Then for a week the flyers will rest at Mr. Putnam's country place at Rye, N. Y., after which they will depart for Chicago by July 19. The Chicago visit will extend until July 22. Thereafter Miss Earhart and her fellow flyers will go to Williamsburg, Pa., Lou Gordon's home town.

"There is almost no likelihood of this itinerary being interrupted," Mr. Putnam said, "but plans for the three after this month are in the making."

Mayor MacVicar stated last night that he had received a letter from Mr. Putnam informing him that Miss Earhart may possibly be able to visit Des Moines some time in the fall after the summer heat has subsided.

Des Moines Sunday Register

Sunday, January 4, 1942

